

# No Favoritism

James 2:1-13



## The Main Point: “Do Not Show Favoritism”

- Read James 2:1-4. Verse 1 presents the main point of James 2:1-13: As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, do not show favoritism.<sup>1</sup> Verses 2-4 present one example of “showing favoritism” in a church assembly, but the main point applies to many situations.
  1. Why might a person or group treat rich and influential people better than poor people?<sup>2</sup> What do you think about their reasons for doing it? What does James say (verse 4)?
  2. In the context of this passage, favoritism relates to treating people differently because of their social and economic status. Is treating different people with different levels of respect ever appropriate? Explain. What cautions should we keep in mind?<sup>3</sup>

## Three Reasons for Not Showing Favoritism

- James gives three reasons for not showing favoritism. Read James 2:5-13.
  - ✚ Favoritism contradicts the character of God (2:5-6a).
  - ✚ Favoritism contradicts our own desire for proper treatment (2:6b-7).
  - ✚ Favoritism violates the law of love, which is central to God’s will for us (2:8-13).

### *Favoritism contradicts the character of God (2:5-6a).*

📖 “For the LORD your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and awesome God, showing no partiality and taking no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner, giving him food and clothing.” (*Deuteronomy 10:17-18, HCSB*).



3. Read James 2:5-7. Verse 5 indicates God has chosen the “poor.” This doesn’t mean God has chosen *only* the poor, or *all* the poor. However, the Bible does reveal God’s special concern for the poor. What is special about the “poor?” (Luke 6:20; Matthew 5:3)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘Favoritism’ (*prosōpolēmpsiais* – found only in Christian writers) refers to ‘the unjustified act or practice of treating some people better than others, for reasons such as looks, social status, wealth, ethnicity, education, etc.’

<sup>2</sup> Reasons may include: 1) they hope that it will benefit them in some way (through reciprocal treatment or strategic positioning); 2) they generally think more highly of people of equal or better status; 3) they want what the rich and influential have (they ‘covet’); 4) they want a share in the power and influence; 5) they fear the rich and influential people and want to stay on their good side.

<sup>3</sup> It may be appropriate to show special respect and honor to particular people at particular times. For example, the Bible instructs us to show respect to those in authority (leaders, parents, etc.). However, while showing special respect to some, we should avoid showing disrespect or dishonor to others. And our motives should always be good.

<sup>4</sup> The Greek word *ptōchos* (‘poor’) designates people who are poor in a material sense. Throughout the Bible, it is clear that God has a special concern for the poor, disadvantaged, powerless and oppressed. Material poverty is often connected with spiritual poverty and humility (Psalm 37:7-14; Isaiah 61:1-2, 7). It’s generally true that the poor and oppressed are more likely to be humble and responsive to God’s provision for their needs. And it should be noted that the poor cannot inherit the kingdom without being humble and responsive to God’s provision in Christ.

4. In what way are the “poor” made “rich” (verse 5)?<sup>5</sup>



*Favoritism contradicts our own desire for proper treatment (2:6b-7).<sup>6</sup>*

- ❑ By favoring “the rich,” they were siding *against* those who share in their mistreatment. Jesus said, “whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them” (*Matthew 7:12*). James indirectly asks, “If you do not like to be dishonored or mistreated, why do you dishonor the poor by favoring those who dishonor and mistreat them?”

*Favoritism violates the law of love, which is central to God’s will for us (2:8-13).*

- ❑ Read James 2:8-13. The “royal law” (2:8) is the law of God’s kingdom. It is the Law as fulfilled, interpreted, and expanded by Jesus. The command to love is central to this law.<sup>7</sup>

5. How is showing favoritism a violation of the law of love?<sup>8</sup>

- ❑ Verse 10 indicates that the person who violates the law at just one point is guilty of breaking the whole law. People tend to pick and choose which parts of God’s will they are willing to obey and disobey. James warns against this attitude and behavior.<sup>9</sup>
- ❑ Instead of showing favoritism, we are to show mercy (2:12-13).<sup>10</sup> And Jesus said, “The merciful are blessed, for they will be shown mercy” (*Matthew 5:7, HCSB*).

6. How can we apply this passage to our lives? In what ways do *we* show favoritism? What are examples? *What* do we need to do to avoid showing favoritism?<sup>11</sup> *How* can we do it?

### *Reflection/Application*

- Think of the specific ways that *you* show favoritism (whether in attitude or behavior). Make a commitment to stop showing favoritism. Instead, show mercy in accordance with the law of love. But remember that the ability to love *as God demands* is impossible apart from Christ. If you have not received Christ, this is the first step. For believers, remember that we obey the “law of freedom” by relying on God’s grace through His Spirit, who enables us.

<sup>5</sup> Though ‘poor’ Christians may lack material wealth, they possess spiritual wealth in the present, and look forward to greater blessings in the future when the kingdom of God is consummated (completed, fulfilled).

<sup>6</sup> The original recipients of James’ letter were mostly poor. In verses 6b-7, James asks them three questions, to be answered ‘yes,’ to remind them that ‘the rich’ have: 1) oppressed them (the rich have gotten richer at the expense of the poor); 2) drug them into court (perhaps harsh treatment related to wages, rents, debts); 3) blasphemed ‘the noble name that was pronounced over [them] at [their] baptism.’ The ‘noble name’ probably refers to Jesus; ‘blaspheme’ may refer to the ridicule of God and the Christian faith and practice.

<sup>7</sup> James quotes Leviticus 19:18 (‘love your neighbor as yourself’) which follows closely after the command to not show favoritism (Leviticus 19:15). Jesus said, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.’ (*Matthew 22:37-40*)

<sup>8</sup> After Jesus said, ‘love your neighbor as yourself’, he was asked, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ (*Luke 10:27, 29*). Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:30-37), which illustrates the difference between favoritism and mercy.

<sup>9</sup> By showing favoritism, we are ‘convicted’ as lawbreakers (*James 1:9*) subject to God’s judgment (1:12-13). Every person will face God’s judgment, and the penalty for sin is eternal death (*Revelation 20:11-15*). Through faith in Christ, the Christian has been freed from the penalty of sin, and has received eternal life (*John 5:24*). In any case, the Christian will still be judged (*2 Corinthians 5:10*) though his/her eternal destiny has already been settled.

<sup>10</sup> Zechariah says, ‘The Lord of Hosts says this: Make fair decisions. Show faithful love and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor...’ (*Zechariah 7:9-10a, HCSB*)

<sup>11</sup> This is not limited to particular situations, but involves a fundamental change in our attitudes and behavior.